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17
May
—
15
June
2013



MIKE COOTER

Set Theory



« We, colonisers of the world, want all things to be talking to us, animals, the dead, statues. These statues are mute and do not speak. They have eyes but do not see. »

Les statues meurent aussi, a film by Alain Resnais & Chris Marker, 1953

Mike Cooter, born in 1978 in Epsom, England, lives and works in London. Inspired by cinema and literature his work leads him to question the role of the artist in society through installations that incorporate sculpture, text, video and photography. Having previously exhibited in the group show *The Big Society* in 2011 curated by Alice Motard, Cooter presents the installation *Set Theory* in the Project Room inspired by Alfred Hitchcock's film *Rope*, released in 1948, adapted from the 1929 play by Patrick Hamilton.

Set Theory, a branch of mathematics rationalised by Georg Cantor at the end of the 19th Century, studies sets as ordering systems for collections of objects. Mike Cooter, in a work typical of his meticulous practice, applies elements of this theory to the décor of *Rope*. Confined to a single bourgeois New York apartment, the film tells the story of two young men who attempt to commit the perfect crime for intellectual satisfaction. Convinced by their solipsistic understanding of Nietzsche, the two characters, who have invited the victim's family and their former philosophy professor for dinner, try to rationalise their moral right to have murdered their colleague. Filmed in continuous takes and in 'real time', the narrative tension and pervading unease are exacerbated by night falling and the increasing visual influence of flashing coloured light from a large neon sign attached to an adjacent building. The incorporation of this lighting prop continues Cooter's interest in the

adaptation of the stylistic traits of European Expressionist cinema into the American "hyper-realism" of *film noir*.

Mike Cooter's installation enacts a pathology of this constructed environment with particular attention to the ethnographic sculptures (Pre-Columbian, African and Oceanic), that pervade the production design alongside their 'modern' interpretations. *Mise-en-scène* acts as a bounding reference for the objects and furnishings. The lighting prop makes transparent the subliminal associations between the collected ethnographic objects, early 20th Century interpretations and the morally degenerate bourgeois aesthetic lifestyle implied by the décor that performs their context.

The light from the letter 'R', white, green, white then red, at once both binds and de-stabilises this relationship. It is, like all the other collected elements, a surviving fragment, an artefact. The rest of the sign is made of wood, a museological reconstitution of an archaeological fragment, a substitution that strives to maintain an overall coherence.

Through this installation, Mike Cooter attempts to decode the ability of popular culture to impose a narrative, highlighting the way objects are instrumentalised to incarnate and ratify specific subjects. The validity of these associations, and the capacity of objects to resist, are at the heart of *Set Theory*.

With the support of Cove Park Residency and with the kind collaboration of Galerie Le Minotaure, Galerie Ratton and Galerie Vallois